



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Leibnizian Pluralism and Bradleian monism

Citation for published version:

Phemister, P 2016, 'Leibnizian Pluralism and Bradleian monism: a question of relations', *Studia Leibnitiana*, vol. 45, pp. 61-82. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10516-012-9190-3>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1007/s10516-012-9190-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10516-012-9190-3)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Studia Leibnitiana

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Leibnizian Pluralism and Bradleian Monism: A Question of Relations

Pauline Phemister (Edinburgh)¹

At the turn of the twentieth century, the poles of monism and pluralism were represented respectively in the philosophies of Francis Herbert Bradley (1846-1924) and Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). Their speculative philosophical systems recursively mirrored the monist-pluralist polarity that had been represented in the seventeenth-century in the philosophies of Spinoza and Leibniz. Cutting across the historical timelines, this paper asks whether Bradley's denial of the reality of relations – a denial that is central to his defence of a non-relational absolute monism – threatens Leibniz's pluralist ontology of individual substances that stand in various relations to one another.

In what follows, I begin with an overview of Bradley's absolute monism before turning his arguments against relational thinking. Where appropriate, I highlight relevant parallels and contrasts between Leibniz's finite substances and Bradley's finite centres. Finally, I assess Leibniz's pluralism in the light of Bradley's arguments by considering whether Leibnizian relations among individual substances can withstand Bradley's critique.

1. Bradley's Absolute Idealism

Bradley defended his absolute idealist metaphysical system in his canonical *Appearance and Reality* of 1893,² in which he contrasts Reality – the single, Absolute Experience that, in the word of one commentator, is 'simply the totality of all that there truly is'³ – with Appearance or appearances, namely, those lesser experiences

¹ I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Pierfrancesco Basile for his useful comments on earlier drafts of this paper and to the organiser and participants of the *Leibniz und die Realität* conference who also provided useful feedback. Errors that remain are entirely my own.

² F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1893). The edition used here is the second edition, published in 1897 and issued in paperback, with an introduction by R. Wollheim, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.

³ T. L. S. Sprigge: *James and Bradley: American Truth and British Reality*, Chicago and La Salle 1993, p. 264.

that exist within the greater whole but which are ontologically less real and epistemologically less true on account of their falling short of the whole in which they reside. In the words of that same commentator, an appearance is only ‘something which has a low degree of reality compared with what would figure in a finally satisfactory metaphysic’, for an appearance is something, the concept of which may be useful, but which is ultimately incoherent and ‘could not be applied in a judgement which was absolutely true’.⁴ Reality is what is truly real and really true; appearances are only partially so. Reality must be consistent, harmonious, unitary, ordered, perfect and timeless. Anything that involves relations, such as time and space, is (for reasons we explore below) fraught with contradiction and therefore cannot be truly real. And since all thought is inherently relational, and thereby contradictory,⁵ it follows that the Absolute is not wholly graspable by thought.

Bradley admits the existence of nothing that falls outside of experience – more precisely, he holds that there is nothing that can be *said* about anything that falls outside of any experience, whether this be the Experience that is the Absolute or the kind of experiences we ourselves have.⁶ Even though Reality, as a single Experience and the highest reality, is an indivisible unity, it incorporates subordinate aspects. Within the Absolute are what he calls, ‘finite centres of experience’, also sometimes termed ‘this-mines’.⁷ These, though less real than the Absolute, are still real to some degree. Their nature is most easily grasped in terms of our own experiences and in terms of experiences we suppose are had by others. A unified experiential state, which may include in its totality both the perceiving self and the world as perceived

⁴ Sprigge: *James and Bradley*, p. 263.

⁵ “Thought is relational and discursive, and, if it ceases to be this, it commits suicide” (F. H. Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, p. 150). The contradictoriness of thought is presented as a problem of the unification of diversity in “Note A. Contradiction, and the Contrary”, in the Appendix of Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, pp. 508-509: “thought in its own nature has no ‘together’ and is forced to move by way of terms and relations, and the unity of these remains in the end external, and, because external, inconsistent. ... my intellect is discursive, and to understand it must go from one point to another, and in the end also must go by a movement which it feels satisfies its nature. Thus, to understand a complex *AB*, I must begin with *A* or *B*. And beginning, say, with *A*, if I then merely *find B*, I have either lost *A* or I have for beside *A* something else, and in neither case have I understood. For my intellect cannot simply unite a diversity, nor has it in itself any form or way of togetherness, and you gain nothing if beside *A* and *B* you offer me their conjunction in fact. For to my intellect that is no more than another external element.”

⁶ Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, pp. 127- 128.

⁷ Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, pp.197-212 *passim*.

from that particular perspective, counts as a ‘finite centre’ – ‘an immediate experience of itself and of the Universe in one’.⁸ Not all finite centres are consciously aware – not all contain an aspect that is a ‘self’ – but all are unified experiential states that differ from the experiential states of others. Each finite centre of experience, as Sprigge explains, ‘is particularly associated with a certain position in the space and time of the object world, from which, so to speak, it looks out at that world’.⁹ Of course, the finite centres of experience cannot be detached from the Absolute whole. Rather, all seemingly independent and inter-related things must, because of the contradictory nature of relations, be subsumed, resolved, transformed or ‘transmuted’ in the Absolute Experience.¹⁰ In the final analysis, even though finite centres are (incoherently) identifiable as specific points of view within an apparent temporal sequence, they are eternally aspects of the timeless Absolute.¹¹ As subsidiary aspects of the Absolute Experience, each finite centre is ‘just one of the positions from which the Absolute looks out eternally at the world’.¹²

Some finite centres have (or rather, ‘are’) experiences that are divided and relational. In the experiential content of some finite centres, it is possible to distinguish the self, on the one hand, and nature or the world, on the other. In others, no such distinction is present: their experience is a mere ‘feeling’, a pre-relational, ‘immediate experience’ in which the finite centre’s experience is not yet broken up into the perceiver and perceived. However, this differentiation of types of finite centres with its implicit suggestion of a plurality of finite centres in relation to each other is ultimately an illusion. In the supra-relational Absolute Experience, contradictions apparent in the relational experiences – including contradictions involved in conceiving a plurality of finite centres in relation to each other – are overcome, synthesised into a unified and undivided whole. Bradley’s Absolute unifies all the experiences had by the finite centres into one grand Absolute Experience.

⁸ F. H. Bradley: “What is the Real Julius Caesar?”, in: F. H. Bradley: *Essays on Truth and Reality*, Oxford 1914, p. 410.

⁹ Sprigge: *James and Bradley*, p. 282.

¹⁰ *Appearance and Reality*, p.183; see also *Appearance and Reality*, p. 529.

¹¹ Some commentators discern in Bradley’s corpus evidence of two kinds of finite centre: momentary and enduring. See Leemon B. McHenry: *Whitehead and Bradley: A Comparative Analysis*, Albany NY 1992, p. 32 and (with qualifications) Sprigge: *James and Bradley*, pp. 281-286. However, cp. Bradley: “What is the Real Julius Caesar?”, p. 411.

¹² Sprigge: *James and Bradley*, p. 282.

Leibniz resisted Spinoza's claim that there is ultimately only one Substance, postulating instead a plurality of co-existing individual finite substances that constitute a universe that is itself only an aggregate of substances and not a unified substance in its own right. Undoubtedly, Leibniz would also have resisted Bradley's assertion of a unified Absolute Experience that contains finite experiential wholes only as aspects, not as substances. Nevertheless, despite the pluralist-monist divide, there are significant similarities between Leibniz's understanding of monadic perceptions and Bradley's view of finite centres of experience.

T. S. Eliot was one of the first to notice similarities in the views of Bradley and Leibniz.¹³ Eliot undertakes a comparison of Leibniz's monads and Bradley's finite centres of experience, finding a remarkable convergence, not least because he avers that Leibniz finds it difficult to differentiate between substantial unities and accidental unities. Once the issue of the substantiality of the monads is brought into question and attention focused on monadic perceptions, Leibniz's monads do come to resemble Bradley's finite centres very closely indeed. Each, for instance, constructs the notion of an external world from its perceptions or experiences, a world it perceives from its own particular point of view and which it in some sense contains within itself – each of Bradley's finite centres, Eliot notes, is 'while it lasts' the whole world.¹⁴

Comparing Bradley's finite centres, not merely with monads *per se*, but rather with the monads' temporary or fleeting perceptions uncovers further similarities. Neither is a substance; each is a fleeting or temporary state. Moreover, each is a unitary experience and, in the case of all monadic perceptions and Bradley's higher-level experiences, embraces multiplicity or diversity in unity. Perceptions that Leibniz considered possible in the case of the higher animals and rational beings – those capable of some kind of consciousness and self-consciousness are not unlike those that Bradley attributed to finite centres capable of relational thought. Even when a

¹³ T. S. Eliot: "Leibniz's Monads and Bradley's Finite Centres", in: *The Monist* XXVI (1916), pp. 566-576; reprinted in: T. S. Eliot: *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*, London 1964, pp. 198-207. More recently, Massimo Mugnai has contrasted Leibniz and Bradley on relations. See M. Mugnai: "Leibniz and 'Bradley's Regress'", in: *The Leibniz Review* 20 (2010), pp. 1-12.

¹⁴ Eliot: *Knowledge and Experience*, p. 204.

rational monad distinctly perceives certain aspects of the world, it does not cease to have insensible perceptions of the rest. Monadic perceptual states are multi-faceted unitary states in which insensible perceptions are often constitutive of sensible perceptual states in which the monad is conscious (as in the case of animals), while both insensible and sensible perceptions are sometimes also constitutive of self-conscious perceptual states (as in the case of thoughts had by rational beings). Similarly, even when Bradley's finite centres include relational thoughts, these retain the lower-level or more basic immediate experiences of bare feeling. As Bradley explains, immediate experience remains as the 'felt background' even in our self-conscious states:

In self-consciousness a part or element, or again a general aspect or character, becomes distinct from the whole mass and stands over against the felt background. But the background is never exhausted by this object, and it never could be so.¹⁵

Our feeling is one and is whole, but none the less may contain pieces of relational matter, inside which the form of feeling is certainly not dominant. ... [It is] an experience ... which, being more than merely simple, holds a many in one, and contains a diversity within a unity which itself is not relational.¹⁶

Effectively, immediate experience remains as a foundation even when we are thinking relationally.¹⁷ However, unlike Leibnizian insensible perceptions, immediate experience cannot be regarded as constitutive of relational experiences, for this would imply a part-whole relation that, as we shall see, Bradley will not condone. A more appropriate comparison holds rather between the finite centre's immediate experience and the monad's perception taken as a whole, in which diversity is reconciled in the unitary state of the monad at any one moment.

¹⁵ Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, p. 174.

¹⁶ F. H. Bradley: "Relations", in: F. H. Bradley: *Collected Essays*, Oxford, 1935, pp. 628-676, pp. 632-633.

¹⁷ Bradley writes: "We in short have experience in which there is no distinction between my awareness and that of which it is aware. There is an immediate feeling, a knowing and being in one, with which knowledge begins; and, though this in a manner is transcended, it nevertheless remains as throughout as the present foundation of my known world ... immediate experience, however much transcended, both remains and is active. It is not a stage which shows itself at the beginning and then disappears, but it remains at the bottom throughout as fundamental" ("On Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience", in Bradley: *Essays on Truth and Reality*, pp. 159-160, 161).

Bradley's finite centres of experience are still appearances, but they are more real than physical objects. Finite centres are themselves unitary experiences and in this respect, they are truer to the character or nature of the Absolute (and hence for Bradley, more real) than are physical objects. Whereas for Leibniz, physical objects are well-founded phenomena, that is to say, they are aggregates of substances whose existence does not depend upon our perceiving them, for Bradley, sensible objects are purely phenomenal – they are nothing more than the sensible contents of immediate experiences or finite centres. We shall consider later the pluralism that Leibniz's view requires. For the moment, however, we confine our attention to Bradley's account of sensible objects.

On Bradley's view, the external world of physical objects is a construction deriving from the content of the finite centres' experiences.¹⁸ It must be understood in relation to the self. Within some finite centres of experience, the content is distinguished into that relating to the self and that which relates to everything else – not-self or nature. The natural or physical world is conceived as a world composed of distinct, inert, non-experiential things. It involves a double abstraction. First, physical objects are abstracted from the experience within which they reside, that is, they are abstracted from the sensible experiences in which they appear. In effect, in order to conceive an external world, we have to consider it as if it were, *per impossibile*, capable of existing independently of any finite centre's or Absolute experience of it. Epistemologically, this separates the knower from that which is known, the perceiver from that which is perceived, an act that leads us further from truth and reality rather than closer. The error is compounded when, by the second abstraction, physical things are separated from each other so that we conceive this mind-independent external world as divided up into distinct and separable objects. Each object is conceived as a distinct individual thing that stands in relation to the others, but which is separable from them.¹⁹

¹⁸ A finite centre is "a basis on and from which the world of objects is made." (Bradley: "What is the Real Julius Caesar?", p. 411. In this sense, nature exists only as the not-self aspect of a finite centre. Whether there are as many object-worlds as there are finite centres or whether it is the same world in each finite centre is a question I cannot address here. However, for discussion, see Sprigge: *James and Bradley*, pp. 532-537, esp. 533 & 537.

¹⁹ A third abstraction comes into play here too as our experiences of this apparent 'world' are similarly divided into experiences of one thing and another, such that one part of the experience of the world is separated from (that is to say, abstracted from) the rest.

In the hierarchical order of degrees of reality, the physical world, abstracted from the experience out of which it is constructed, is less real than the finite centres from which it arises. As experiences in which ‘many’ aspects are unified in a single experience, finite centres bear greater similarity to the Absolute Experience that is Reality; their character is truer to the nature of the Absolute, though still, as mere aspects of the Absolute, finite centres fall short of full reality. Not being a unified experience, however, the physical world as mere appearance is less real than either the Absolute or the finite centres of experience.

Both the physical world and finite centres are less real than the Absolute because their concepts are contradictory. They can therefore occur only as appearances, for what is real cannot involve contradiction. Reality itself must transform or transcend all contradictory relations. Contradictions, Bradley contends, arise in all forms of relational thought. Thinking of a plurality of finite centres that stand in relation to each other exposes a morass of contradiction. In the Absolute, therefore, there is no plurality of independent, self-subsisting finite substances – or, in Bradley’s terminology, no plurality of independent, self-subsisting ‘reals’.²⁰ In the case of physical objects, contradictions appear when individual objects are perceived as standing in various relations (spatial, causal, etc) to each other and when they are conceived as standing in relation to the self that perceives them. All such contradictions, so Bradley argues, can be overcome only when transformed within the Absolute that transcends all relations.

2. Bradley’s Argument against Relations

Although Bradley argues against the possibility of reducing a relation to a quality of a substance in chapter 2, his formal argument against relations generally is presented in chapter 3 of *Appearance and Reality*. In a four-part argument, he attempts to show that both internal relations (those essential relations that belong to things related as properties such that the very natures of the things would be different if they did not stand in relation to each other) and external relations (accidental relations that are

²⁰ Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, pp. 124-126 *passim*.

extraneous to the things related such that the natures of the related things would be unaffected if the relation did not hold)²¹ are contradictory and unreal. While for practical purposes, relational ways of thinking are indispensable, we err if we take them as holding true of Reality itself.²²

Bradley's strategy in *Appearance and Reality* consists in arguing that each of four jointly inconsistent propositions must be true. Since relations require that all four are true, relations and relational ways of thinking are thereby exposed as contradictory and condemned to the status of appearance rather than reality. In turn, Bradley argues that:

- (i) Qualities (terms) are nothing without relations
- (ii) Qualities (terms) with relations are unintelligible
- (iii) Relations without qualities (terms) are nothing
- (iv) Relations with qualities (terms) are unintelligible²³

Bradley maintains that all four propositions, (i) through (iv), must be true if relations are to be possible, but of course, all four cannot be true without becoming entangled in contradiction. (i) through (iv) cannot all be true at the same time. On the side of qualities, there can be no qualities *without* relations (i), but equally there can be no qualities *with* relations (ii), while on the side of relations, there can be no relations *without* terms (iii), but nor can there be any relations *with* terms (iv). If Bradley's arguments for each proposition succeed, he will have shown that relational ways of thinking are infected throughout with contradictions and that, therefore, on the assumption that Reality is non-contradictory, they are no more than illusory appearances that are not true of Reality itself.

²¹ See Bradley: "Relations", pp. 642-645.

²² Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, p. 28.

²³ In his essay, "Relations" (op.cit.), Bradley prefers to talk of "terms" rather than "qualities". A "term" is "so far independent as to have become an individual with a being and character of its own" (p. 634). Terms, therefore, can stand in relations to each other while each nonetheless retains retaining its own individuality, a feature that is not so evident in the case of qualities. In chapter 3 of *Appearance and Reality*, following discussion of the relation between a thing and its qualities in chapter 2, Bradley treats "term" and "quality" as interchangeable.

(i) and (iii) comprise the argument against external relations, while (ii) and (iv) constitute the argument against internal relations. We examine Bradley's critique of external relations first.

2.1 Against external relations: (i) and (iii)

(i) Qualities (terms) are nothing without relations

That there can be no qualities if qualities do not stand in some relation to each other, Bradley thinks is evident from the fact that qualities differ from each other and so, at the very least, must stand in relations of difference. Not only do we never find qualities without relations, but we never can find any quality without a relation, for the very coming into being of one quality distinct from another implies at least a relation of difference between the two qualities. We can only pick out a particular quality in our field of consciousness by distinguishing it from others – we can only, for instance, isolate a red patch in our visual field if we also notice that it is distinct from the differently coloured surrounding areas. Of course, if there were only one quality in existence, this would not stand in relation to another. This would be a possibility if the universe were no more than a single quality in the sense of being 'one unbroken simple feeling'.²⁴ However, Bradley denies that this is really what we mean when we talk of 'quality'. By quality, we usually mean to refer to one quality differentiated from others: 'a universe confined to one feeling would not only not be qualities, but it would fail even to be one quality, as different from others and as distinct from relations.'²⁵

However, although we need relations in order to identify individual qualities and to differentiate them from each other, can we not claim that once so distinguished, they assume a relation-independent existence? Surely, once a quality has been identified through its difference with others, we can then forget about the difference and concentrate solely on the quality as it is in and of itself, independently of its relation to the others. Bradley rejects the suggestion. He refuses to separate the process of differentiating the quality from the nature of the quality itself, instead insisting that the process by which a quality comes into being is part of its essence. Being perceived in relation to other qualities is essential to the nature of any quality. The

²⁴ Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, p. 24.

²⁵ Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, p. 24.

relations in which one quality stands to others are therefore internal relations, essential both to the existence and to the nature of each. In short, therefore, there can be no qualities (plural) without relations.

Leibniz is in basic agreement with Bradley on this issue. Everything, in his view, is internally related to everything else in the universe:

“There is no term which is so absolute or so detached that it does not involve relations and is not such that a complete analysis of it would lead to other things and indeed to all other things.”²⁶

(iii) Relations without qualities (terms) are nothing

In the second part of his argument against external relations, Bradley notes that there can be no relations unless there are terms related by that relation. The point may be granted. Relations relate and must therefore have terms that they relate. As Bradley states, “a relation without terms seems mere verbiage ... a relation, we must say, without qualities is nothing.”²⁷ Hence just as the relations are essential to the very being or nature of qualities, so too qualities or terms are essential to the very being or natures of relations. Any relation must itself be internally related to the terms it relates. No relation can stand alone independently of the terms that it relates.

Even if there could be such a purely external relation, its very independence would mean that it would fail to relate its terms at all. The relation would bear no point of contact with the terms, nor the terms with the relation: “From neither side will there be anything like a contribution to, or an entrance into, the other side – or again to, or into, that union of both which we experience as a relational fact.”²⁸ Leibniz’s opinion was not dissimilar. He too held that merely external (or extrinsic) relations are inadequate. “[T]here are no purely extrinsic denominations, denominations which have absolutely no foundation in the very thing denominated,” he writes in *Primary Truths*, going on to explain,

²⁶ A VI vi 228; *New Essays*, trans. P. Remnant and J. Bennett, Cambridge, 1985, p. 228.

²⁷ *Appearance and Reality*, p. 27. We may suppose that this is the case even if the terms themselves are relations.

²⁸ Bradley: “Relations”, p. 642.

“For it is necessary that the notion of the subject denominated contain the notion of the predicate. And consequently, whenever the denomination of a thing is changed, there must be a variation in the thing itself.”²⁹

Although this passage can be read in line with Russell’s conviction that extrinsic denominations depend upon, or can be reduced to, monadic, non-relational predicates in the subject (or term) of the relation,³⁰ it can also be read in such a way as not to exclude the possibility that at least some of the internal properties of the subject on which the extrinsic denominations depend may be relational properties.³¹ Bradley, however, finds the notion of internal relations equally as problematic as that of external relations.

2.2 *Against internal relations (ii) and (iv)*

Bradley’s argument in *Appearance and Reality* against internal relations is subtle, but the problem is clear: internal relations involve infinite regresses.³²

(ii) Qualities (terms) with relations are unintelligible

Bradley contends that in order for any quality to be internally related to another, it must have a “double character” or inner diversity, one aspect of which is the quality in itself (that which supports or grounds the relation) and the other being the relational aspect (the result of the thing standing in relation to another). In Bradley’s own words, “Each has a double character, as both supporting and as being made by the relation. It may be taken as at once condition and result”.³³ In effect, Bradley is suggesting that if a quality is to be internally related to another, it has to have its own

²⁹ C 520; *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, tr. & ed. R. Ariew & D. Garber, Indianapolis, 1989, p. 32. See also GP II 240; Leibniz to De Volder, April 1702: “Nam in loco esse non est nuda extrinseca denominatio: imo nulla datur denominatio adeo extrinseca ut non habeat intrinsecam pro fundamento”.

³⁰ B. Russell: *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*, London, with introduction by J. Slater, London, 1992, pp. 12-15, 58.

³¹ Hidé Ishiguro, for instance, has suggested that at least in the middle period, Leibniz intended the complete concept of an individual substance to include even those predicates that “ascribe relational properties to the individual.” (H. Ishiguro: *Leibniz’s Philosophy of Logic and Language*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, 1990, p. 131).

³² A regress also arises in respect of external relations: if a relation is needed to relate two terms, then there is also a need for a further relation to relate the relation to each of its terms.

³³ Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, p. 26.

character; only if this is so, can it have its own being as one of the terms in the relation. The quality must possess both its own core aspect – the foundation from which the relation may arise – and the relational aspect by which it is linked to the other. The intuition supporting this view is not dissimilar to what, in Leibniz studies, Ishiguro has called “the presupposition thesis”, namely, the thesis “that things cannot stand in a relation to each other without having non-relational properties.”³⁴ There must, it is claimed, be some non-relational properties by which a thing can be identified as an individual thing: “the set of non-relational properties of a thing must be enough to distinguish it from all others.”³⁵ The distinct individual, with its non-relational properties, is then capable of standing in relation to other individuals, also in possession of non-relational properties.

Unfortunately, if, as Bradley maintains, qualities in relation do possess a “double character” as both condition and result, an infinite regress comes into view. The condition-aspect and the result-aspect within the quality introduce a distinction within the quality that threatens its unity. The two aspects must themselves be internally related to each other. However, this in turn will require a distinction in each of the aspects into further conditions and results, leading to a distinction within each aspect that can again only be brought into relation by another distinction of condition and result, and so on to infinity.

Bradley’s argument against there being qualities with relations depends on the distinction of condition and result within the quality, but it is possible to question whether the condition and result really are separable. If they are not, the regress does not get started. Some commentators have argued against the separation of condition and result. Richard Wollheim, for instance, has claimed that Bradley considers as cause and effect, or as ground and consequent, what are really one and the same thing: colour A can only be darker than colour B if A is the colour it is, but it can only be the colour it is if it is darker than B. These are no more than two different ways of considering the same thing.³⁶

³⁴ Ishiguro: *Leibniz’s Philosophy of Logic and Language*, pp. 126-127.

³⁵ See Ishiguro: *Leibniz’s Philosophy of Logic and Language*, p. 130.

³⁶ R. Wollheim: *F. H. Bradley*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1959, reissued 1969, pp. 114-115.

However, even if in fact the condition and result are identical, the erroneous separation in thought is enough to allow the regress to begin and for the inherent contradictions in relational thought to emerge: “the question”, Bradley insists, “is how without error we may think of reality”.³⁷ Ironically, Wollheim’s own example demonstrates that the condition and result are distinguishable in thought and this is the very point that Bradley requires in order to highlight the contradictions inherent in thinking relationally. We need to be able to separate the condition and the result, the term and its relation to another term, if we are to be able to identify a quality (colour A) as one quality among others (distinct from colour B). However, in so doing, if the relation is internal, we open the door to the devastating infinite division of conditions and results in the quality itself.

Leibniz’s position on this matter is complex. On the one hand, he would appear to agree with Bradley’s point that in order to distinguish one quality, we must understand it in relation to others. Even the most seemingly absolute and non-relational term contains some reference to others. In the *New Essays*, he takes issue with Locke’s distinction between absolute terms which do not refer to anything outside of themselves and relative terms that do lead the mind to consider ideas of other things. For Locke, the term ‘black’ is absolute – it does not require reference to anything other than itself. However, Leibniz points out that we can consider terms as absolute and non-relative only when we understand them incompletely. A complete or adequate idea of ‘black’ must include reference to its cause – for instance to the organisation of the particles in a black coloured object and to the way in which these particles interact with our organs of sight. The same holds true of all terms, in Leibniz’s opinion: “there is no term which is so absolute or so detached that it does not involve relations and is not such that a complete analysis of it would lead to other things and indeed to all other things.”³⁸

On the other hand, however, it is not clear that Leibniz would have accepted Bradley’s claim that the condition and the result – the quality itself and its relations to others – can be separated within the quality itself in such a way as to produce an

³⁷ Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, p. 20.

³⁸ A VI vi 228; *New Essays*, trans. Remnant and Bennett, p. 228.

internal division within the quality itself that then generates the destructive infinite regress that Bradley conceives. As Ishiguro notes with explicit appeal to the discussion of absolute and relative terms in the *New Essays*, “Leibniz’s general thesis, then, is ... that there is no way of characterizing things without invoking both the relational properties and the non-relational properties of the things in question.”³⁹ In the context of Bradley’s critique, we may presume that Leibniz would deny that we identify the quality in itself, as condition, separately from consideration of the quality in relation to others, as result. In other words, it is not possible to separate the two aspects that Bradley thinks comprise a quality’s “double-character”. However, even if relational and non-relational properties of a quality or term are separable, the ensuring infinite regress might not be as devastating as Bradley makes out. We shall discuss this in a moment, but first, let us briefly mention the fourth and final part of Bradley’s argument against relations.

(iv) Relations with qualities (terms) are unintelligible

Bradley had argued in (iii) that there can be no relations in the absence of the qualities or terms that they relate. Equally, however, he now argues in (iv) that taking terms or qualities with their relations is untenable for, as in the case of qualities with relations (ii), an infinite regress is generated. For a relation properly to relate two terms, it must be internally related to each term in turn. This however, introduces an internal diversity within the relation itself. When a relation relates A to B, Bradley insists that it cannot be merely a common property of both A and B (“for then what keeps them apart?”), nor can it belong only to both A and B separately (“for then again there is no relation between them”).⁴⁰ Rather, the relation must be somehow over and above A and B taken individually. But now we need a “new connecting relation” to relate the relation (R) itself to each of its terms.⁴¹ Not being a property of the terms, R begins to look like an independent term over and above A and B. But how, then, is R related to A and to B? New relations must now come into play to relate R to A, on the one hand, and to B, on the other. However, the same problems immediately recur and the regress is set in train. As Bradley eloquently explains:

³⁹ Ishiguro: *Leibniz’s Philosophy of Logic and Language*, p. 107.

⁴⁰ Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, p. 27 note 1.

⁴¹ Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, p.27.

“we are hurried off into the eddy of a hopeless process, since we are forced to go on finding new relations without end. The links are united by a link, and this bond of union is a link which also has two ends; and these require each a fresh link to connect them with the old.”⁴²

It is not uncommon to reject Bradley’s reasoning here on the ground that it falsely treats relations as if they were terms.⁴³ If they are not terms, then there may be no need to insist the links must themselves be related and the regress does not begin. However, Bradley has already insisted that the relation must be something distinct from its terms, for otherwise, the terms will be no more than externally related (and hence not really related at all) or they will simply collapse into each other. Besides, since relations are frequently themselves treated as subjects and compared and contrasted with each other – for instance, it might be said that the sibling relationships are closer than relationships between cousins – it is not clear just how much force this objection can really command.

2.3 Vicious and non-vicious regresses

A more promising rejoinder to Bradley’s arguments in both (ii) and (iv) addresses the issue of the infinite regress that relations generate. The response acknowledges the regress, but refuses to admit it as a serious problem. Thus, Wollheim describes the regress as ‘unobjectionable’.⁴⁴ The relation, he claims, merely implies the regress; it does not require it as a condition of the very possibility of the relation. If the relation merely generates an infinite regress as a consequence of itself, it is not a vicious regress. If, on the other hand, the infinite regress is a condition that must be fulfilled on order for the relation to be, then the regress is vicious and makes relations impossible.⁴⁵ Given that relational experiences occur, there is some reason to think that the regress is non-vicious. Certainly, Leibniz appears unconcerned by the infinite

⁴² Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, p. 28.

⁴³ For instance, B. Russell: *An Outline of Philosophy*, London, 1927, p. 263. Cited in Wollheim: *F. H. Bradley*, p. 113. See also, C. D Broad: *An Examination of McTaggart’s Philosophy*, 2 vols. Cambridge, 1933, vol. I, pp. 84-85. Leibniz too may be said to treat external relations as terms when he describes them as “ideal” or “mental” things. See note 57 below.

⁴⁴ Wollheim: *F. H. Bradley*, p. 114. Cp. Broad: *An Examination of McTaggart’s Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 85-86.

⁴⁵ Wollheim: *F. H. Bradley*, pp. 113-114.

regress involved in self-reflective perception. In his Paris Notes, he observes that self-reflection – the perception of perception – involves an infinite regress, and he gives an account of how we might stimulate such perceptions, albeit suggesting that the regress is discovered rather than generated:

“If anyone wants to experience these things [perpetual reflections on reflections], then all he has to do is this: at some time in the darkness of the night, when it happens that he cannot sleep, let him begin to think of himself and of his thinking and of the perception of perceptions, and begin to wonder at this state of his, and – as it were by different beats of the mind – go more and more within himself, or above himself; then he will wonder that he has not experienced this state of mind previously. ... I have not yet explained satisfactorily how there come about these different beats of the mind, with that constantly reciprocated reflection, and, as it were, the intervals of these beats. They seem to occur by the distinguishing awareness of the corporeal intention; but, if you observe carefully, that beat only brings it about that you remember that you had this – namely, the reflection of a reflection – in the mind a little before, and you, as it were, observe this, and designate it by a distinct image which accompanies it. Therefore it had already existed before, and so the perception of a perception to infinity is perpetually in the mind, and in that there consists its existence *per se*, and the necessity of the continuation.”⁴⁶

Leibniz hints in this final sentence that not only is the infinite regress of perceptions of perceptions non-vicious, it is also necessary to the very existence and continued existence of the mind itself.

On his side, Bradley denies the substantial reality of the mind. Regarding his four-part argument against relations as conclusive proof that “Every relation does and again does not qualify its terms, and is and is not qualified by them”,⁴⁷ he establishes, to his

⁴⁶ A VI iii 516-517; “On Reminiscence and on the Mind’s Self-reflection” (April 1676), trans G. H. R. Parkinson: *G. W. Leibniz: De Summa Rerum. Metaphysical Papers, 1675-1676*, New Haven & London, pp. 73, 75.

⁴⁷ Bradley: “Relation”, p. 638. See also: “Every relation (unless our previous inquiries have led to error) has a connexion with its terms which, not simply internal or external, must in principle be both at once.” (ibid., p. 641).

own satisfaction, the contradictory nature of all relations. To accept relations as true and real absolutely is therefore “plainly untenable”.⁴⁸ Such reasoning extends to the idea of a mind, soul or self, conceived as standing in relation to whatever is not-self, an external world of nature. The idea of mind, soul or self, substantial or otherwise, is fraught with contradiction: in reality, there can be no individual selves.

Nevertheless, Bradley cannot – and does not – deny experiences such as Leibniz’s reflective perception of perception altogether. Relational thinking in which we separate ourselves from the objects of our thought and separate the objects from each other may be contradictory appearances, but relational phenomena do occur. But how can this be? Relations, so Bradley contends, are “actual or real” only insofar as they are contained within a “felt unity”:

“to be actual or real, surely there is nothing which can fail in some sense to be contained in it [i.e. feeling] and to belong to it, however much within its own further character it must also pass beyond. Thus every relation, to be even possible, must itself bear the character of an element within a felt unity – and apart from that is an abstraction which by itself is nothing.”⁴⁹

Hence, for Bradley, self and not-self stand in relation to one another only when held together in an immediate experience or feeling that is a unitary finite centre of experience. Neither self nor not-self exists – or can exist – as a distinct substance; each is only one aspect within a finite centre’s experience. “Self” acquires meaning by being placed in opposition to whatever is considered as “not-self”,⁵⁰ but this relational opposition can be real only to the extent to which it is unified in a finite centre’s experience. The distinction between the self and the not-self is a distinction made within a finite centre’s experiential content.⁵¹ Hence, Bradley would seem to be in

⁴⁸ Bradley: “Relations”, p. 641.

⁴⁹ Bradley: “Relations”, pp. 633-634.

⁵⁰ Bradley: “What is the Real Julius Caesar?”, p. 416. See also, Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, pp. 75-82.

⁵¹ The actual experiential content – what belongs on the side of the self and what belongs on the non-self side – is fluid: “It is far from certain that at some time *every* feature of the self has, sooner or later, taken its place in the not-self; but it is quite certain that this holds of by far the larger part. And we are hence compelled to admit that very little of the self can belong to it essentially” (Bradley: *Appearance and Reality*, p. 78).

agreement with Leibniz's view that an experience can contain relational thought, even if a regress is implicated by self-conscious awareness in one's perception of one's own perceptions. Like a finite centre of experience, a monad's perceptual state may combine the perceiving self with its perceptual content and still hold all in a single unity.

3. Monism and pluralism

So far we have been considering finite centres individually. However, each finite centre is only one finite centre among many and must be related to these others too. Accordingly, Bradley argues that for these relations between the finite centres themselves to be actual, they too must be held within an even wider experience. My experience of my-self as distinguished from my-not-self, and your experience of your-self as distinguished from your-not-self can only co-exist in relation to each other provided they are unified within a wider experiential whole. Pursuing this line of reasoning, Bradley postulates the existence of an Absolute Experience that encompasses all experiences:

“the one Reality is present in a plurality of finite centres, but so that these do not directly share their experiences as immediate. None the less the one Universe is there, and it is real throughout, and it is also a higher experience in which every unshared diversity is unified and harmonized.”⁵²

The various experiences had by a plurality of finite centres of experience are united within the one infinite Absolute Experience. This Experience is an undivided unity within which our own finite experiences are merely ‘components’ or aspects. In this way, Bradley admits only one substance or, rather, one unified Experience as Reality.

Leibniz's view is somewhat different. The Leibnizian world is no more than an aggregate of substances, each of which is strictly independent of the others and capable of existing in their absence. Leibniz advocates a plurality of individual substances, each of which holds both self and not-self within its unitary experiences,

⁵² Bradley: “What is the Real Julius Caesar?”, p. 413.

but which do not have to be glued together by a Spinozistic or Bradleian Absolute. So, can the Leibnizian plurality of individual substances survive the Bradleian critique of relations? I have already cast doubt on Bradley's argument against internal relations, suggesting that the infinite regress that is generated there may not be problematic – the regress might not be vicious – at least in the case of monads' perceptions. If the regress is not vicious, then each monad can, like Bradley's Absolute, unify its internally related content and indeed, can contain the entire world within itself. This, as we shall see, provides a basis from which external relations may ensue.

Certainly, through its perceptions, each mind, soul and entelechy represents everything in the universe. Moreover, perceiving minds, souls and entelechies are like mirrors that represent the whole universe.⁵³ The monad's qualities – its perceptions and appetitions⁵⁴ – are implicitly relational: perceptions are always perceptions of something; appetitions are always focused on a desired object or possible state of affairs. Perceptions, as Ishiguro notes, are relational facts in which external complexity is represented in the simple.⁵⁵ The essence or concept of each individual substance brings that substance into relation with all the other substances that make up the world, each holding its perceptions of all of the others within its own unitary experience or sequence of experiences.

Monads' qualities are internally relational both in the non-Bradleian sense that they are internal to the monad (they arise spontaneously from the monad's essence and would do so even if no other monad existed) and in the Bradleian sense that the relational qualities, its perceptions and appetitions, are constitutive of the monad's identity – the qualities cannot be separated from the monad as if they were just insignificant extras. Did the monad not possess the qualities that relate them to other actual or merely possible beings, it would not be the particular monad that it is. What happens in other possible or actual beings is reflected in the internal relational

⁵³ GP IV 434; *Discourse on Metaphysics*, trans R. Ariew and D. Garber: *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, Cambridge, 1989, p. 42.

⁵⁴ GP VI 598; *Principles of Nature and of Grace*, trans Ariew and Garber, p. 207.

⁵⁵ Ishiguro: *Leibniz's Philosophy of Logic and Language*, p. 110. Hence, in sharp contrast to Russell's account of monadic predicates as non-relational, Ishiguro observes that "although "... perceives" and "... perceives something" are monadic predicate expressions in the sense that they have only one blank space, they express relational properties." (ibid.).

qualities of each substance: “there are no extrinsic denominations, and no one becomes a widower in India by the death of his wife in Europe unless a real change occurs in him.”⁵⁶ Similarly, he writes to De Volder:

In my opinion, there is nothing in the whole created universe which does not need, for its perfect concept, the concept of everything else in the universality of things, since everything flows into [*influo*] every other thing in such a way that if anything is removed or changes, everything in the world will be different from what it is now.⁵⁷

Each monad contains, as it were, the whole world, represented from its own unique perspective. In this respect, Leibniz’s monads seem to perform the same unifying function as Bradley’s finite centres of experience and, ultimately, as Bradley’s Absolute Experience. Bradley conceives the Absolute as transforming relations in order to resolve the apparent contradictions. The Absolute Experience is not a relational experience – the Absolute is not an intellect that thinks relationally. Leibniz, however, regarding the infinite regress generated by self-conscious perception as unproblematic, retains qualities as relational within the monadic unity. The unity of the monad can embrace relational thoughts without destroying them. For Bradley, problems concerning internal relations are resolved through their incorporation within an Absolute Experience. For Leibniz, not acknowledging Bradley’s regress problem, relational qualities are incorporated without contradiction within monads’ experiences, each of which, albeit from its own perspective, is a unified representation of the manifold multiplicity of the world in its entirety.

However, Leibniz rejects solipsism. There is not only one monad that embraces an entire world in its perceptions. On the contrary, he conceives an infinity of such

⁵⁶ GP VII 321-322; *On the method of distinguishing real from imaginary phenomena*, trans L. Loemker: *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters*, Dordrecht, 1969, p. 365. And in a letter to Arnauld, 14 July 1686, Leibniz explains: “the concept of an individual substance includes all its events and all its denominations, even those which are commonly called extrinsic, that is, those which pertain to it only by virtue of the general connection of things and from the fact that it expresses the whole universe in its own way.” (GP II 56; trans Loemker: *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters*, p. 337).

⁵⁷ GP II 226; to De Volder, 6 July 1701, trans Loemker: *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters*, pp. 524-525. In a footnote, Loemker reminds us that the term ‘*influo*’ here indicates logical dependency (p. 540 n12).

monads – an infinite plurality of finite substances, each of which represents all the others in its unified experience. Moreover, Leibniz also conceives each monad, with its internal relational qualities, as utterly devoid of “windows”. The windowlessness of the monads entails an extreme form of causal independence among the monads such that each could exist with no change to its nature and perceptions even if the others did not exist. Despite their internal relations whereby what happens in another substance affects what occurs in the former, the plurality of created windowless monads implies external relations among them.⁵⁸ Pluralism, as Bradley himself was well aware, requires external relations: “Pluralism, to be consistent, must, I presume, accept the reality of external relations.”⁵⁹

However, given Bradley’s critique, the question arises as to whether monads can indeed be externally related to each other. Whereas external relations among Bradley’s finite centres are transmuted or incorporated within the Absolute Experience, Leibniz, rejecting monism, has no recourse to such a solution. So, the question remains: can his substance-pluralism survive Bradley’s denial of external relations? Could Leibniz have given a satisfactory response to the charges Bradley

⁵⁸ In Leibniz’s opinion, external relations are mental abstractions grounded in qualities of the related things: “My judgment about relations is that paternity in David is one thing, sonship in Solomon another, but that the relation common to both is a merely mental thing whose basis is the modifications of the individuals” (GP II 486; letter to Des Bosses, 21 April 1714, trans Loemker, *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters*, p. 609). See also:

“The ratio or proportion between two lines, L and M, may be conceived three several ways; as a ratio of the greater L, to the lesser M; as a ratio of the lesser M, to the greater L; and lastly, as something abstracted from both, that is, as a ratio between L and M, without considering which is the antecedent, or which the consequent; which the subject, and which the object. ...

In the first way of considering them, L the greater; in the second, M the lesser, is the subject of the accident, which philosophers call relation. But which will be the subject, in the third way of considering them? It cannot be said that both of them, L and M together, are the subject of such an accident; for if so, we should have an accident in two subjects, with one leg in one and the other in the other; which is contrary to the notion of accidents. Therefore, we must say, that this relation, in this third way of considering it, is indeed out of the subjects; but being neither a substance, nor an accident, it must be a mere ideal thing.” (GP VII 401; Leibniz’s fifth letter to Clarke, trans H. G. Alexander: *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, Manchester, 1956, p. 71)

Russell attributed Leibniz’s view of external relations as mere ideal things to his inability “to admit as ultimately valid, any form of judgment other than the subject-predicate form” (Russell: *A Critical Exposition*, p. 13).

⁵⁹ Bradley: *Essays on Truth and Reality*, Oxford, 1914, p. 237.

brought against external relations? In what follows, I suggest that, rather than answer the charges directly, Leibniz could have, in large part, circumvented them.

When Bradley argued against external relations in (i) and (iii), he had insisted that the process or means by which a quality comes into existence alongside others cannot be separated from the quality itself, the product. The existence of a quality such as “red” bears some essential relation of difference to other colours and the process of identifying “red” as a distinct colour is in part a process of differentiation from other colours. The other colours are essential to our ability to recognise “red” as a distinct colour, but also the very nature of redness itself requires the relations of difference to other colours that were essential to our identification of it. Bradley, in effect, refused to separate the process by which a quality comes into being and quality itself, the product of that process.

Leibniz, as we saw, also held that, epistemologically, process and product, the cause and its effect, are inseparable. As we noted earlier, for instance, Leibniz insisted against Locke that the term ‘black’, if adequately known, must include details of its cause. However, for Leibniz, the formation of concepts, from those of qualities to the complete concepts of individual substances, occurs at the level of possibility. It is here that process and product are inseparable. The process of production of the complete concepts (and possible worlds) in the divine mind has been analysed in detail by Ohad Nachtomy. Stating the Bradleian dilemma succinctly – “On the one hand, individuals presuppose their relations; on the other hand, relations also presuppose the individuals they relate”⁶⁰ –, he offers a route out of the problem that involves distinguishing incomplete (non-relational) concepts of individuals from the complete concepts of individuals that include relations of that individual to all others in the same possible world. Through God’s co-consideration of the incomplete concepts, the concepts of individuals, now considered in relation to each other, acquire the internal relational predicates that complete them and that, at the same time locate each individual within a particular possible world. Complete concepts and possible worlds are thereby “mutually constitutive”.⁶¹

⁶⁰ O. Nachtomy: *Possibility, Agency, and Individuality in Leibniz’s Metaphysics*, Dordrecht, 2007, p. 93.

⁶¹ Nachtomy: *Possibility, Agency, and Individuality*, p. 108. See also, p. 97.

On this account, the identification of the individual (the product) through its differentiation from others (the process) is performed in the divine mind prior to the creative act that brings actual individuals into existence. External relations among the concepts of possible individuals arise from their co-consideration in a single thought in the divine mind and lead to the inclusion of internal relational predicates in these concepts of possible individuals, a process in which the concepts of individuals become complete. These complete concepts with their relational predicates are held in the divine mind as God chooses which world to create.

In this way, the inseparability of process and product that led Bradley to deny purely external relations occurs prior to creation, leaving the way open for actual external relations among individuals to arise on the creation of a pluralistic world. At the point of the creation of a world, each monad can be regarded as an independent being. The process of construction of its essence has occurred in God's mind, prior to its creation. A monad's internal relational qualities (perceptions and appetitions) are established at the level of possibility. These point to other substances that, when they too are created by God, are not only internally related to the others, but also externally related, for each created substance is independent and separable from the others: any of the others might be annihilated without incurring any change to the internal relational qualities or essences of those remaining.⁶² These external relations require only the existence of the others. The coming together of product and process that generate the internal relational qualities – so crucial to the identity of each one of them considered singly – has already taken place and need not now pose a problem for external relations among created things.

Bradley had supposed that all relations fall into two mutually exclusive camps: relations are either internal or external. He then argued relations and qualities (terms) must be both internally related and externally related, but that they cannot consistently be either internally or externally related. Internal relations threaten the separation

⁶² Clearly, external relations among substances appear at the level of created reality, but of course external relations among concepts are present in the realm of possibility, where, we may assume that, although externally related to each other, they are united in God's thought.

required for terms to be individuals that can then be related to each other, yet external relations separate their terms so much that they cease to be related at all. His response to this contradiction was to propose a metaphysical monism according to which all apparent relations and relational thought are transformed beyond recognition within the single Absolute Experience.

Leibniz's pluralism also requires both internal and external relations: substances must be both internally related and externally related. However, I have suggested that in Leibniz's case, this need not necessarily lead to the contradictory state of affairs that Bradley would later outline. For Leibniz, monadic relations are internal in one respect, namely, in relation to the monad's representative or expressive nature, as specified by the relational predicates included in the possible complete concept of the individual through the co-consideration of incomplete concepts in the divine mind. These relational predicates – ultimately the relational qualities or properties of created monads – are essential to the very identity of the monad and it is in this sense that it can be said that what occurs in one created monad is reflected in – and makes a difference to – the others. On the other hand, monadic relations are external insofar as each monad is an independent, windowless substance created as one among many other such windowless substances in a pluralistic universe. In short, monads have internal relational properties and also stand in external relations to others. No contradiction arises provided each kind of relation is considered in respect of its proper domain and understood in the correct manner.

Nevertheless, attractive though this solution may seem, it does not entirely absolve Leibniz from the difficulties that Bradley raises regarding relations. By way of conclusion, I will mention one. It may be objected that the account given above, far from resolving Bradley's worries, merely transfers the problem of relations from the world of created things to the realm of possibilities. Bradley insists that the Absolute Experience does not think in relational terms. Although finite centres of experience can, and do, think relationally, their relational thought is still fraught with contradictions arising from the infinite regress that arises in relation to internal relations. According to Bradley, the Absolute, if it is to be non-contradictory, cannot become embroiled such infinite regresses and is therefore assumed not to think

relationally. Leibniz's God, on the other hand, does appear to consider things relationally.

In one respect, this, for Leibniz, is perfectly reasonable. After all, as we have seen, he does not consider the infinite regress arising from internal relations as vicious. No vicious regress makes monads' relational thoughts contradictory and nor, we may suppose, does a vicious regress infect God's relational thought. However, even if we allow that God can, in principle, think relationally, there remains a question as to the origin of the non-relational terms (and incomplete concepts) whose co-consideration in God's Mind leads to the formation of the complete concepts of possible individuals. God is supposed to co-consider what are otherwise independent terms, but how can such a plurality of terms arise in the first instance? Do they not, as Bradley maintains, need to be differentiated from each other – and hence considered in relation to each other – before each can be a separate term? Are not their differences from each other at least in part constitutive of their unique identities? The resulting circle would seem to be one that even God could not break: for God to co-consider many logically independent things, He would have to first conceive each separately, but this is not possible, since the identification of one term among many requires that the terms are co-considered at least in respect of their differences. It would seem, on this reasoning, to be logically impossible for God to conceive many independent things prior to considering them in relation to each other. Nor does Leibniz's understanding of God help in this regard. His account of the construction of incomplete and complete forms starts from a conception of God in which God's mind is already in possession of a plurality of eternal simple forms.⁶³ Our question here, however, concerns the very possibility of this plurality. Bradley's concerns about the plurality of forms (or terms) have merely resurfaced at this earlier stage.⁶⁴

⁶³ Nachtmann: *Possibility, Actuality, and Agency*, pp. 22-23.

⁶⁴ One might at this point emphasise the eternality of the simple forms and declare that an explanation of their plurality, while not forthcoming, is also unnecessary. Alternatively, one might suggest that God be conceived as in possession of only one simple form in the first instance and explore ways in which plurality may arise from this – perhaps through repetition or recursion.